Jeff Johnson named as FirstNet vice chairman; CTO resignation announced
  Urgent Communications By Donny Jackson

December 10, 2014

Movement within FirstNet 's leadership continued this week, with board member and
public-safety veteran Jeff Johnson being named as the organization's new vice chairman and
the announcement that Chief Technical Officer (CTO) Ali Afrashteh has resigned for personal
reasons.

Industry observers have predicted for months that Johnson would be named as vice chairman.
Johnson has chaired FirstNet's Outreach Committee since its creation and headed FirstNet's
outreach efforts on an operational basis until full-time staff was hired to do the job.

"I'm pleased to tell you that Jeff Johnson has agreed to accept this position as vice chair, and I
cannot be more pleased about that," FirstNet Chairwoman Sue Swenson said during
yesterday's meeting of FirstNet's Governance and Personnel Committee. "Jeff and I have
known each other since FirstNet began, and we've worked very closely together.

"For those of you who know Jeff, this won't come as a surprise. You know that Jeff has spent
his career in public safety, so he knows this extremely. He was also a significant member of the
group that actually created the enabling legislation that made FirstNet a reality."

Indeed, Johnson was one of the key public-safety officials that lobbied for several years on
Capitol Hill to convince federal lawmakers to reallocate the 700 MHz D Block spectrum to first
responders. In 2012, Congress passed a law that reallocated the D Block airwaves, created
FirstNet and dedicated $7 billion in federal revenues to fund FirstNet's mission to develop a
nationwide broadband network for public safety.

In addition to serving on the FirstNet board, Johnson is CEO of the Western States Fire Chiefs
Association. Johnson also is a past president of the International Association of Fire Chiefs
(IAFC).

Johnson's public-safety background is expected to be particularly valuable as he continues his role as the FirstNet board's key liaison to the Public Safety Advisory Committee (PSAC) and in establishing the vision for the nationwide broadband network, Swenson said.

"Having a public-safety professional in the vice-chair role is significant and important to this effort," Swenson said. "It will help me, the FirstNet board and FirstNet management achieve our vision and our mission, which is to build a network for public safety. That's the reason we exist today, and to accomplish that is really important."

In addition, this week marked the first public acknowledgment by FirstNet that Afrashteh has resigned after six months in the CTO role, ending his time with the organization at the end of November. Officially, Afrashteh left FirstNet for personal reasons, but FirstNet Technology Committee Chairman Barry Boniface said that "we wish him [Afrashteh] a speedy recovery as he tackles his next endeavor."

FirstNet Deputy CTO Jeff Bratcher is serving as the organization's Acting CTO.

As for FirstNet's highest-ranking staff position, no update was given on the status of the nationwide search for a replacement for former General Manager Bill D'Agostino, who resigned in April. Since then, TJ Kennedy has served as FirstNet's Acting General Manager.

However, that title soon will change, as FirstNet this week opted to change the nomenclature for the position from "General Manager" to "Executive Director." The title change is expected to become effective in 10 days, according to a FirstNet spokesman.

[Link to Article](#)

[Link to Urgent Communications News Articles](#)